

<b>Meeting Title</b>	Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
<b>Report Title</b>	Nottingham City Council's response to the Ofsted ILACs inspection
<b>Meeting Date</b>	26 <sup>th</sup> January 2023

<b>Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):</b>	Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People Ailsa Barr, Director for Children's Integrated Services
<b>Portfolio Holder(s):</b>	Councillor Cheryl Barnard
<b>Report author and contact details:</b>	Ailsa Barr – Director Children's Integrated Services Sam Morris – Head of CIS Strategy and Improvement.

## Summary of issues:

This report provides an update to Scrutiny Committee of the Action Plan submitted to Ofsted in response to the ILACS inspection that took place in July 2022 and the activity that is underway to address the areas of concern.

Immediately following the inspection, the Leadership Team identified and implemented immediate actions that were required to be taken to ensure that children were safeguarded and were able to receive the right response at the right time. These immediate actions, as well as longer term improvement actions, were pulled into the formal Ofsted action plan which was submitted in December 2022. This sits alongside a wider and more far reaching updated development plan to drive improvements across Children's Integrated Services, which the leadership team were working to and which has identified areas for improvement outside of the inspection process.

Delivery of children's services is a significant statutory duty for the council and a priority for the whole Council. The inspection by the regulator, Ofsted, provides an important assessment of the impact of services in terms of outcomes for children. There are formal regulatory consequences of the inspection outcome which need to be addressed. It is essential that the council takes the actions necessary to achieve the sustainable improvements required for children.

## Recommendation(s):

1. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the improvement plan that has formally been accepted by Ofsted
2. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the actions taken since the last inspection.

## 1. Background

- 1.1 Committee will be aware that Nottingham City Children's Services received an Ofsted ILACS inspection in July 2022 with the report being published in September 2022. The outcome of the inspection was:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate (limited by the grading within the domain of children in need of help and protection).

1.2 The inspection identified 8 specific areas for improvement:

- Effectiveness and timeliness of responses to children’s needs when first presented to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).
- Management oversight and direction of front-line work and the local authority designated officer (LADO).
- Social work capacity so that social workers and first-line managers can respond effectively to children in need of help and protection, and that children in care have greater consistency of social worker.
- Placement sufficiency for children in care and those with complex needs.
- The service response to care leavers aged 21 and over.
- The service response to young people who are aged 16/17 years who present as homeless.
- The quality and timeliness of return home interviews.
- Oversight of children missing from education and those who are electively home educated.

1.3 Following inspection, the local authority is required to submit to Ofsted an action plan which addresses the inspection findings within 70 working days of the publication of the inspection report. As required, on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022 the Local Authority submitted an action plan to Ofsted in response to the 8 areas for improvement. Ofsted formally responded on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022 confirming that the action plan accurately reflects the findings of the inspection.

1.4 The Ofsted Action plan is monitored through the Children’s Improvement Board, which is chaired by an independent Department for Education Improvement Advisor. The Improvement Board has been restructured to form a monthly Executive Improvement Board and quarterly Partnership Improvement Board. The Executive Board focusses largely on improving the performance of the Council’s Children’s Services following the Ofsted inspection, whilst the partnership board has oversight of the progress being made by internal services as well as in the broader children’s partnership. The Executive of the Children’s Improvement Board supports the work of the Board in

delivering children's services in Nottingham that result in consistently good outcomes for children, young people and their families. The Executive Improvement Board membership includes the Portfolio Lead Member with responsibility for Children, Young People and Education, the Chief Executive as well as senior leaders, ensuring robust monthly senior leadership oversight of progress improvements. The Partnership Board is made up of senior partnership leaders in addition to the Executive Improvement Board members.

- 1.5 In addition to the monthly monitoring of the Ofsted improvement plan through the Improvement Board, the division has an internal process to ensure robust delivery and accountability. Programme management support and resources are being provided to each Head of Service to support delivery of the plan and ensure deadlines are met and evidence of impact is being gathered. Delivery is monitored through a monthly internal challenge panel, made up of the Children's Integrated Services leadership team, chaired by the Service Director for Children's Integrated Services, which undertakes deep dive challenge against specific areas within the improvement plan. Internal monitoring of progress of the Ofsted action plan and wider transformation plan is delivered through a monthly programme board, which is also chaired by the Service Director for Children's Integrated Services. Both Boards report to the Corporate Director through a monthly Oversight and Assurance Meeting which she chairs.

## **2. Progress against the Ofsted ILACS inspection**

- 2.1 Although the action plan was required to be submitted on 12<sup>th</sup> December the leadership team had already commenced the actions within the plan, meaning that some actions had been completed or were well in progress at the point of submission. The information below sets out the key, high level actions that have taken place to improve the response to children and young people, along with activity that is planned over the next 3 months. As noted above the impact of the improvement on outcomes for children and young people has been and will continue to be monitored through the Children's Improvement Board.

### **1. Effectiveness and timeliness of responses to children's needs when first presented to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH)**

What actions have we taken?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Created and recruited to an additional 8 social worker posts and a MASH service manager post to increase capacity within the MASH to ensure a timely response to contacts and referrals and a greater oversight of data and timeliness of response, as well as improving relationships with partners.</li> <li>• Implemented a RAY (red, amber, yellow) system which enables the service to prioritise the response time based upon levels of risk to ensure children at greatest risk are prioritised with all children receiving a timely response appropriate to their needs and risks.</li> <li>• Implemented monthly dip samples undertaken by senior managers to ensure that decision making and application of thresholds in the MASH is appropriate and consistent. To ensure findings are robust, a sample of the monthly dip sample is being externally audited and verified by an independent auditor.</li> <li>• Working with partners through workshops and task and finish groups to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ improve obtaining of consent by care givers to ensure that consent is being consistently obtained to reduce delays to decision making.</li> <li>○ ensure that there is a consistent approach to partners applying statutory thresholds and children are being supported by an appropriate service at the right time</li> <li>○ improve early help assessments so that accurate and appropriate information is being captured which aids the correct decision being made at the right time.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>This will ensure that there is a timely response to children, which is appropriate to their needs and levels of risk they are experiencing. This will be evidenced through the number of open contacts and consistent application of thresholds. As an example, the number of open contacts has reduced from 603 in June 2022 to 196 in October 2022. There has been a corresponding improvement in timeliness - from 158 out of 603 contacts being open for longer than 6 days in June to 26 out of 196 contacts in November being open for 6 days (none exceeded 5 working days).</p> <p>Confidence that decision making, and application of thresholds is being consistently applied. For example, in October 120 dip samples were undertaken of which only 4 required further information to be sought</p> <p>Ensuring that consent is being sought and partners are gathering robust information and applying thresholds consistently, will enable children to receive an appropriate response from an appropriate service that meets their needs without delay. Where it is appropriate for child to be referred to the MASH, decision making will be swift the appropriate information to inform decision making and consent has been received.</p>
What actions are planned?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working with partners at a strategic level:</li> </ul>	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ to secure wider representation of agencies at the MASH and in multi-agency domestic abuse decision making. This will ensure all partners with relevant information or perspectives are part of multi-agency decision making to enable more robust and confident decisions to be made.</li> <li>○ To review and strengthen the current arrangements for strategy discussions to ensure that all required agencies are present, that discussions are timely and there is a consistency of approach to convening discussions, information sharing and decision making.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finalise practice guidance for MASH colleagues which will provide clear expectations and ways of working for colleagues</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Review processes that staff have to undertake within the case management system to ensure that these are focussed upon outcomes for children, reduce bureaucracy and support timely information sharing</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ensure data reports capture helpful measures and enable staff working in the MASH, as well as senior leaders to understand the impact the work is having for children and young people.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase staff and partner understanding of the importance of obtaining consent through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Workshops with staff delivered by our sector led improvement partner, Essex, at the staff conference on 1<sup>st</sup> February</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Wider, consistent representation at strategy meetings will enable improved decision-making by ensuring that appropriate partner information is shared and considered, and a collective decision is made through collaborative partnership working. This will mean that children receive a timely response appropriate to their needs.</p> <p>This will support staff by providing a clear framework of expectations and ensure consistency of practice as well as expectations around management footprint on a child's file. This will ensure that children receive a timely and consistent response when they present to the MASH.</p> <p>This will ensure that systems are simple to use and focussed upon outcomes for children and that staff are supported through systems and data that enable them to make decisions and progress good outcomes for children.</p> <p>By ensuring that consent is being sought and partners are gathering robust information and applying thresholds consistently, will enable children to receive an appropriate response from an appropriate service that meets their needs without delay. Where it is appropriate for child to be referred to the MASH, decision making will be swift the appropriate</p>
--	---

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Series of action learning sets being delivered to MASH staff with the first session being on consent.</li> <li>○ Developing Thinking Tools for staff around the issue of consent</li> </ul>	<p>information to inform decision making and consent has been received</p>
--	--

**2. Management oversight and direction of front-line work and the local authority designated officer (LADO)**

<b>What actions have we taken?</b>	<b>What impact will this have?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Secured Frontline training for Social Work Team Managers through a DFE funded and approved management programme.</li> <li>● Created a process which sees service managers reviewing a child's plan where they have been a long term Child in Need or subject to a long term Child Protection Plan (9 months) with team managers to ensure intervention is purposeful and appropriate action is being taken to reduce any drift or delay ensure clear management oversight.</li> <li>● Created 2 additional missing children advocate posts and a team manager post to create additional capacity within the team to enable a timely response to children who go missing. Recruitment to these posts is underway.</li> <li>● Reviewed the policies and procedures for referral to the Local Authority Designated Officer and published these to ensure that these are in line with national guidance and that partners understand who the Local Designated Officer is and how to refer allegations against professionals in a timely manner.</li> </ul>	<p>This will support team managers to develop their confidence in applying their knowledge and skills to provide high quality oversight of practice and guidance to front line workers in a fast-paced environment. This will enable robust management oversight of a child's journey through improved child centred plans, timely actions being taken and reduced drift in timescales.</p> <p>This will ensure that children are not kept on plans for longer than necessary and that intervention is purposeful and securing good outcomes for children and young people</p> <p>This will create additional capacity to ensure that children who go missing receive a timely return home interview in line with statutory timeframes. The additional frontline capacity and management oversight will also enable a better-quality analysis of the factors that led the child to go missing which will then feed into a robust safety plan for the child.</p> <p>This will ensure that partners know who the Local Authority Designated Officer is and how to refer. This will ensure a timely referral and response to allegations against professionals that is in line with national guidance.</p> <p>Increasing the number, quality and consistency of case file audits that take</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed and refreshed the quality assurance and moderation panel processes with a view to increasing the number and quality of audits undertaken as well as ensuring consistency in auditing to better understand the quality of practice within the service. DFE funding has been obtained to build temporary capacity to enable increased auditing activity to take place.</li> </ul>	<p>place, will provide managers with a clearer picture of the consistency of quality of practice across the service. This will allow managers to highlight strengths upon which to build or identify areas for further improvement which can be addressed through learning and development activity, the development of practice tools and further improvement work. This will ensure leaders understand the service well to ensure that more children receive good quality intervention and improved outcomes</p>
<b>What actions are planned?</b>	<b>What impact will this have?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of practice guidance to support staff in their work with children and young people by providing a clear framework of expectations for staff</li> <li>Recruit 2 temporary agency workers to undertake 40 case file audits a month.</li> </ul>	<p>Clear practice guidance will provide staff and managers with a clear framework of expectations in their work with children and families. This will mean that children receive a consistent quality response to their needs and there will be clear management oversight and guidance to front line staff to ensure children receive the right support at the right time.</p> <p>This will generate additional capacity to undertake audits to assure managers of the consistency of quality of practice across the service to inform learning and development and the development practice tools to ensure that more children receive good quality intervention and improved outcomes.</p>

**3. Social work capacity so that social workers and first-line managers can respond effectively to children in need of help and protection, and that children in care have greater consistency of social worker.**

<b>What actions have we taken?</b>	<b>What impact will this have?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worked with Human Resources to develop wider and varied recruitment streams to increase the opportunities to recruit into social work posts and increase social work capacity (through Step up to social work, apprenticeships scheme etc)</li> <li>Worked with Human Resources to improve advertisement to showcase Nottingham as a good place to work</li> </ul>	<p>This will increase the opportunities for people to obtain a qualification in social work rather than relying on a nationally depleted pool of qualified social workers. Increasing recruitment opportunities to a wider pool of talented workers, will enable the service to build capacity and support the retention of 'home grown' social workers, reducing caseloads and increasing stability for children and families.</p> <p>This will seek to improve interest in applicants wishing to work in Nottingham and once successful will mean that social</p>

and speed up recruitment processes to shorten the time between successful interview and starting in post.	workers can be in post without any undue delay. This will seek to increase the number of social workers, reducing caseloads improving stability in the workforce and improving outcomes and stability for children and families.
<b>What actions are planned?</b>	<b>What impact will this have?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project management support to develop a learning academy which will provide an improved learning offer and career development for staff.</li> <li>Work with Heads of Service, Human Resources and the Children's Integrated Services Workforce to refresh the workforce strategy. This will set out the offer for recruitment and retention of the workforce.</li> </ul>	<p>Improved development pathways and learning offer for staff will provide staff with the skills they need to deliver improved outcomes for children. Staff will feel supported.</p> <p>This will provide a clear offer to the Children's Integrated Services workforce with aim of increasing recruitment and retention rates.</p>

#### 4. Placement sufficiency for children in care and those with complex needs.

<b>What actions have we taken?</b>	<b>What impact will this have?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Worked regionally and locally to increase inhouse and external provision for homes for children who need to come into the care of the local authority.</li> <li>Started work with our transformation partner – Newton Europe – to progress the modernisation of fostering strand of the programme</li> </ul>	<p>This will increase the range and number of homes that can provide a child with stability and security appropriate to their needs without a delay. Joint commissioning with the D2N2 authorities has resulted in block contracts being established for 4 children homes, 10 supported accommodation placements and 20 supported lodging placements.</p> <p>This will seek to increase the number of in-house foster carers to provide children with a home within a family environment where this is more appropriate for the child's needs.</p>
<b>What actions are planned?</b>	<b>What impact will this have?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to work with our transformation partner – Newton Europe – to progress the modernisation of fostering strand of the programme to increase foster carer capacity.</li> <li>Update the Sufficiency Strategy to develop a clear strategy to support long term sustainable homes for children who need to come into the care of the local authority.</li> </ul>	<p>This will increase the number of foster carers that will enable children to live in a home that suits their needs and provides them with a safe and secure family environment.</p> <p>A robust sufficiency strategy will set out how the authority will ensure sufficient long term sustainable homes for children who need to come into the care of the local authority, to allow them to live in a home</p>



	that suits their needs, providing them with stability and security as soon as possible after coming into care.
--	--

## 5. The Service response to care leavers aged 21 and over

What actions have we taken?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created an additional 4 personal advisor posts to increase the service capacity to support children leaving care into adulthood.</li> <li>Working with partners to update and improve the local offer for care leavers to support them into adulthood and remove barriers and disadvantage.</li> <li>Obtained funding from the Department for Education to develop a website / application for the local offer. This will create a more user-friendly way for care leavers to access the information they need around their rights and entitlements.</li> </ul>	<p>Care leavers will be able to easily access the local offer and understand what support they are entitled to. They will be able to access support through a personal advisor as needed, enabling supported transition into adulthood, reducing the disadvantages they face from having been a child in care and increasing their future opportunities and outcomes.</p>
What actions are planned?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruitment to 4 Personal Advisor posts to increase the service capacity to support children leaving care into adulthood.</li> <li>Finalise and publish the local offer for Care Leavers, to clearly set out the rights and entitlements that they can access to support them to transition into adulthood successfully.</li> <li>Website / application to be finalised which enables care leavers to access the local offer and support they are entitled to in a user-friendly manner.</li> </ul>	<p>Care leavers will be able to easily access the local offer and understand what support they are entitled to. They will be able to access support through a personal advisor as needed, enabling supported transition into adulthood.</p>

## 6. The service response to young people age 16- and 17-year olds who present as homeless

What actions have we taken?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refreshed the protocol and designed a leaflet for young people who present as homeless to set out</li> </ul>	<p>Children presenting as homeless will be clear about the options that are available and will be supported to access appropriate</p>

<p>clearly the options that they will be supported to access.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meeting with Housing Aid to explore the placement and social housing options to ensure that there are sufficient safe and appropriate accommodation options when children present as homeless.</li> </ul>	<p>options in a timely way to ensure they are placed in a safe environment without any delays. There will be a sufficient number of accommodation options to meet children's needs when they present as homeless.</p>
--	---

## 7. The quality and timeliness of return home interviews for children

What actions have we taken?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Created 2 additional missing children advocate posts and a team manager post to create additional capacity within the team to enable a timely response to children who go missing.</li> <li>Reviewed and updated policy, procedures and standards in line with national guidance and best practice to ensure that the response to children who go missing is timely, and in line with national expectations.</li> </ul>	<p>This will create additional capacity to ensure that children who go missing receive a timely return home interview in line with statutory timeframes. The additional frontline capacity and management oversight will also enable a better-quality analysis of the factors that led the child to go missing which will then feed into a robust safety plan for the child.</p>
What actions are planned?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit to missing children and team manager posts.</li> <li>Share updated policy and procedures with partners so that partners have a shared clear understanding of expectations when children are reported missing.</li> </ul>	<p>This will create additional capacity to ensure that children who go missing receive a timely return home interview in line with statutory timeframes. The additional frontline capacity and management oversight will also enable a better-quality analysis of the factors that led the child to go missing which will then feed into a robust safety plan for the child. Partners will be clear about expectations for children who go missing which will further strengthen the arrangements.</p>

## 8. Oversight of children missing from education and those who are electively home educated

What actions have we taken?	What impact will this have?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed and strengthened arrangements and processes for children missing from education to ensure a timely and consistent response to children who are missing education.</li> </ul>	<p>Improved consistency of practice and ability to identify families quickly and ensure the best possible outcomes for children by reducing the length of time they are out of education.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reviewed best practice across other local authorities for recording, addressing and reporting on identified safeguarding risks to identify good practice and strengthen existing ways of working.</li> </ul>	<p>Learning from best practice will enable the service to improve its processes for recording, reporting on and responding to any safeguarding risks to children.</p>
<b>What actions are planned?</b>	<b>What impact will this have?</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a process to enable city schools to report vulnerable children on part time timetables to the Local Authority.</li> <li>Develop a local system based on best practice from other Local authorities to record, address and report on safeguarding risks.</li> </ul>	<p>The Local Authority will have an up to date list of vulnerable children on part time timetables to support regular review of their readiness to access full time timetables.</p> <p>Learning from best practice will enable the service to create a more robust system to ensure safeguarding risks to children who are electively home educated are identified and children receive the right support at the right time.</p>

### 3. Next steps

- 3.1 The Authority has now entered into a period of monitoring visits - short inspection activity focused on a specific area – between now and the next full inspection, which is likely to be in approximately 3 years' time. We can expect 3 or 4 monitoring visits each year – the first one is anticipated early in 2023 and is expected to focus on the response of our MASH and duty service when receiving new information and referrals regarding children and young people.
- 3.2 Two inspectors will usually carry out each monitoring visit, which will last for 2 days. The outcome of the first monitoring visit is not published, the second and subsequent monitoring visits are published by Ofsted. The on-site activity will usually focus upon the experience of children and young people within the area being inspected but Inspectors will also check that performance in other areas has not deteriorated. It is for this reason that activity is focused upon the wider improvement plan and securing improvements across all service areas to ensure that focus on one area does not see a deterioration in another. Rather a holistic systemic improvement across Children's Integrated Services is planned.

### 4. Detailed information regarding 'Front Door' service progress

- 4.1 The Authority is anticipating our first Ofsted monitoring visit in the first 3 months of 2023; it is expected that this visit will focus on the effectiveness of response to children when their needs are first presented to the MASH. Work to improve our work in this area of the service had commenced prior to the full inspection in July 2022 but the scale of improvement needed meant that we had not been able to effect sufficient progress by the time of the inspection, this meant that the majority of contacts were delayed in MASH and management oversight was not consistently effective when applying thresholds to safeguard children.
- 4.2 Since July 2022 we have taken various steps to improve the service and assure ourselves of improved impact for children. We have increased management oversight through creating an additional service manager post, this means that our MASH

service and our Duty assessment service now each have their own dedicated service manager who takes the lead on developing good practice, reviewing performance information and addressing areas of drift or delay, By having 2 service managers in post we are assured of the management capacity to effectively oversee and improve practice in these two busy parts of our service. In addition to this we have progressed recruitment for 8 additional permanent social workers to work in our MASH, this will mean that social workers will be more involved in triaging information when it is first received by the service, this reduces delays when receiving information.

#### 4.3 To support the service in measuring impact we have taken several actions:

- Developed a daily method of reviewing, prioritising and responding to information received by the MASH. This means every contact is prioritised as it is received and then performance reporting enables us to measure our response to the information in relation to the presenting need. Managers now have access to a daily performance report to support their overview of the work, this reduces delays and means that any slippage in timeliness is spotted early and mitigations are put in place to resolve.
- Since July 2022 we have continued a process to review decisions of no further action following receipt of information in the MASH. This means that the service manager and head of service between them review 30 decisions a week. We have also had an external auditor review this audit work. The internal audit work and the work of the external auditor have not identified any children at risk of harm where decisions needed to be changed, this provides assurance that where the presenting issues are of immediate hard the right decisions are being taken to respond to the concerns. The audit work has identified a small number 5 of children where the decision to progress to no further action was considered premature and further information was needed to make a full decision. On these occasions as well as the additional work being completed to achieve the right outcome for the child work was completed with the worker and their team manager to support learning in the service.
- We have embedded a process of 'mystery shopper' activity, whereby an external social work qualified manager contacts the MASH to 'make a referral'. Information is provided to staff to assess their response and provide feedback to them to improve practice. Staff do not know when this activity will happen and there were occasions during the Autumn where the response from staff was inconsistent and not at a level that provided assurance regarding consistency of practice. This information was used to provide feedback to staff and more recently our 'mystery shopper' feedback has been much improved.
- In December we had a 2 day visit from Essex County Council staff who are providing some support to the service under the Department for Education partners in practice scheme. 5 staff from Essex spent 2 days with the MASH reviewing progress, this involved reviewing children's records, speaking with staff, and observing practice. The feedback from our Essex colleagues was useful to help us understand progress and to confirm areas for further development. In summary the feedback was:
  - Areas of strengths identified:
    - Staff morale is high, colleagues are keen to support the improvement journey. Colleagues described feeling valued and supported.
    - The changes in the leadership team have supported swift and purposeful change.
    - The new staffing structure is line with demand.

- In the main the response is in real time which is not only positive for families but increasing confidence in the service across the partnership.
- The relationship with the Duty Assessment service is positive and this evidenced.
- Colleagues spoke about the MASH becoming a learning environment where they have more time to stop, pause, reflect, and make informed decisions for children and families.
- Colleagues were heard using respectful and engaging language whilst speak to families.
- Areas for further development:
  - Consent to share information is not widely understood by colleagues working within the MASH. There is lack of understanding around how its gained and how it should be used. This lack of understanding internally means that we don't consistently support meaningful partnership understanding of consent, which means at times information is shared with MASH that cannot be quickly progressed by MASH staff as we do not have parental consent to do so.
  - Some conversations with callers into the MASH around advice are not always recorded on the case management system.
  - Written process guidance and process maps supporting workflows within the MASH is not yet available to staff. This means that colleagues do not consistently know what the expectations are. When temporary changes are made to processes these are not communicated effectively.
  - There isn't formal induction process for staff who join the MASH. This means that colleagues seek support from peers who may not be following the correct processes.
  - The strengths-based practice model is not yet evident in the written work in the MASH and contacts often do not support strengths-based language.
  - Some contacts are adult focused with there being a lack of identifying the direct impact on children of adult behaviours.

4.4 The feedback from Essex broadly corresponded with our own assessment of progress to date and the areas for further development are areas that we have actioned planned to progress.

4.5 We are more confident now that information received into the MASH is reviewed as it is received and decisions about prioritisation of response are made at the first opportunity, this together with improved performance manager systems means that we know that our timeliness of decision making has improved and there are further actions planned throughout January and February to further improve, meaning that we can be assured that most children will receive a response in the right timeframe to the presenting need.

4.5 The audit work that we have built into the service provides assurance about the appropriateness of decisions being taken, however, this is an area for us to remain vigilant in as we want to be sure that as a partnership we are responding with the right service at the earliest opportunity as opposed to relying on the right social work service being provided as the need escalates. This work will link with our work with partners to develop a city-wide early help strategy to ensure joined up approaches and responses across the partnership to the provision of early support.

